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- NEWS RELEASE -

BYSIEWICZ BLASTS U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS' BAN ON VOTER **REGISTRATION DRIVES**

SECRETARY OF THE STATE OUTRAGED BY POLICY DISENFRANCHISING VETERANS

HARTFORD: Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz today June 30th openly defied the Department of Veterans Affairs' nationwide policy prohibiting voter registration drives among veterans living at federally funded nursing homes, rehabilitation centers and shelters for homeless veterans. Sec. Bysiewicz was joined by Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, veterans and veteran's advocates at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in West Haven to blast the policy, register veterans to vote, and distribute information on the state's new voting machines at the facility. Sec. Bysiewicz was able to register 12 veterans to vote outside the facility Monday afternoon.

"The practice and policy of banning voter registration drives at veterans facilities is an slap in the face to the people that have served, put their lives on the line and scarified the most for our fundamental freedoms. It is simply wrong" said Bysiewicz. "It defies logic that this administration would even consider disenfranchising tens of thousands of veterans who have served our country and now require care. At a minimum we should make it easier for our veterans to register to vote."

Earlier this month in preparation for the November 4, 2008 Presidential Election, which promises to bring voters to the polls in record numbers, Secretary Bysiewicz requested permission to visit both inpatient and outpatient facilities to educate veterans, especially veterans with disabilities, about Connecticut's new voting machines. Last week, however, West Haven Veterans Hospital denied Secretary Bysiewicz's request.

Secretary Bysiewicz has written to Mr. Roger Johnson, Director of Veterans Affairs Connecticut Healthcare System. "I view this denial of access both as a civil rights violation of the deepest measure and as a moral slap in the faces of those veterans who are supposed to be served by the VA Connecticut Healthcare System – veterans attempting to put their lives back together after leaving those lives behind to serve our country," wrote Bysiewicz. "Since your organization has refused to give us a reason for this denial, and since I can think of no legitimate reason to deny veterans access to information about their voting rights and how to use new voting machines... Certainly, it does not reflect what is in the best interests of the veterans you are supposed to serve."

Secretary Bysiewicz is calling on the Federal Elections Assistance Commission to launch an investigation to determine whether veterans living in these facilities are being unfairly denied access to information on the new voting machines.